06/02/22 BIG BROTHER NEWS WATCH

We'll Have 'Virtual' Babies Within 50 Years + More

The Defender's Big Brother NewsWatch brings you the latest headlines related to governments' abuse of power, including attacks on democracy, civil liberties and use of mass surveillance.

By Children's Health Defense Team

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We'll Have 'Virtual' Babies Within 50 Years, AI Expert Predicts

New York Post reported:

If you thought the Tamagotchi Generation was a 1990s phenomenon, think again.

In the not-so-distant future, those looking to expand their families may opt to do so with the help of artificial intelligence.

The average American child costs parents more than $230,000 by the time they reach the age of 17, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

A digital kid, on the other hand, could have all its needs met for less than $25 per month — that's just about $5,100 by the time they reach high school graduation — according to the U.K.'s leading.

Advocacy Groups Urge Schumer To Call Vote on Antitrust Bill

The Hill reported:

A coalition of more than 20 advocacy groups are urging Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) to call a vote on a bipartisan antitrust bill that aims to limit tech giants from preferencing their own products and services over rivals.

"This is an opportunity to pass legislation that will immediately result in a concrete increase in competition in an industry that touches the lives of every American, and we must not pass it up. We are pleased that you intend to bring [the American Innovation and Choice Online Act] to the floor, and urge you to act as quickly as is practical," the groups wrote in a Thursday letter, according to a copy first provided to The Hill.

The letter is signed by groups including Demand Progress, Center for Digital Democracy, Athena and Public Citizen.

Jewel-Osco Stores Reinstate Mask Mandate for Employees Due to High COVID Transmission

NBC 5 Chicago reported:

As a new subvariant of omicron continues to spread across the country and COVID cases continue an uptick in Illinois, Jewel-Osco stores are asking employees to once again wear masks.

"Jewel-Osco continues to follow the guidelines set by the CDC and Illinois Department of Public Health," a spokesperson from Jewel-Osco said in an email statement to NBC 5. "Due to current high COVID transmission rates in the counties where we have stores, the Distribution Center, and the corporate office we are requiring associates and vendors to wear a mask."

As of Tuesday, 15 counties in Illinois are currently at "high community transmission."

This Google-Less Android Smartphone Is Meant for Privacy

KnowTechie reported:

Ever wondered what it would be like to run an Android phone without Google being everywhere? That's what Murena aims to accomplish. The $379 Murena One is the first device from the company, and it tries its best to be Google-less.

That's right, someone decided to de-Google the Android operating system. Gael Duval decided to do something about the amount of data collection his smartphone did, saying "Like millions of others, I'VE BECOME A PRODUCT OF GOOGLE."

That moment of realization became the privacy-focused /e/OS. Used on devices from Fairphone and Teracube, it's de-Googled so no Google services touch your data.

1 Million Copies Sold — 'The Real Anthony Fauci' — The book that launched a movement. BUY TODAY!

Canadian Government Slams Tim Hortons for Using Its App To Spy on Customers

The Verge reported:

Tim Hortons used its mobile app to collect "vast amounts of location data" from users, including tracking when they visited competing coffee shops, says Canada's privacy watchdog. Yesterday, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada released the results of a 2020 investigation into the coffee and donut chain, demanding it delete any remaining location data and limit future collection. Tim Hortons, the commission says, has agreed to implement the regulations.

The full report outlines a sweeping, invasive attempt to deduce Tim Hortons customers' behavior in order to target advertising at them — although the company apparently never actually used the data for that purpose. It notes that in May 2019, Tim Hortons updated its mobile app to collect granular, frequent location updates from users' phones. American geofencing platform Radar analyzed patterns in the data to infer where users lived, when they worked, and when they were traveling. Its near-constant collection clashed with statements that it only gathered location information when the app was open, and it only updated its disclosures when the Financial Post published an article exposing its detailed data collection — sparking the commission's investigation.

Oregon Is Shutting Down Its Controversial Child Welfare AI in June

Endgaget reported:

In 2018, Oregon's Department of Human Services implemented its Safety at Screening Tool, an algorithm that generates a "risk score" for abuse hotline workers, recommending whether a social worker needs to further investigate the contents of a call. This AI was based on the lauded Allegheny Family Screening Tool, designed to predict the risk of a child ending up in foster care based on a number of socioeconomic factors.

But after the Allegheny tool was found to be flagging a disproportionate number of black children for "mandatory" neglect, and a subsequent AP investigative report into the issue, Oregon officials now plan to shutter their derivative AI by the end of June in favor of an entirely new, and specifically less automated, review system.

The department's own analysis predicts that the decision will help reduce some of the existing racial disparities endemic to Oregon's child welfare system. "We are committed to continuous quality improvement and equity," Lacey Andresen, the agency's deputy director, said in a May 19 email to staff obtained by the AP.

Google Is Planning to Low-Key Nix Its Location-Based Assistant Reminders, but Why Now?

Gizmodo reported:

"Okay Google... Set a reminder to remind me to remind you to stop your location reminder feature."

"...Done."

Thanks, Google. Well, if you go to the Google Assistant Help page, it now says that the ability to create reminders on the app "is going away soon." Additionally, the ability to assign a reminder to someone else is also going the way of the dodo.

9to5Google first reported that the tech giant's plans to ax location-based reminders on Google Assistant-enabled devices, such as user phones or Google Home. The soon-to-be nixed feature was first spotted by users on Reddit. Some commenters complained that the feature never truly fulfilled its promise. Others said they found the feature useful, even while using it on iOS devices.

Shanghai Reportedly Bans Media Use of the Term 'Lockdown' As Lockdown Ends

The Guardian reported:

Authorities in Shanghai have reportedly ordered the media to refrain from using the term "lockdown" while reporting on the end of the city's two-month lockdown.

This week the Chinese city of 25 million people reopened, allowing most to leave their homes, go to work, and use public transport after more than 60 days inside. On Thursday, according to leaked directives from the city, Chinese media were told to disseminate information about the changes to restrictions, but ordered not to use the phrase "ending the lockdown."

"Unlike Wuhan, Shanghai never declared a lockdown, so there is no 'ending the lockdown'," said censorship directives issued to media on Tuesday, and leaked to the China Digital Times.

SUGGEST A CORRECTION

Children's Health Defense Team

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